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## **Competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania: a comparative study**

Cosciug, Nicolae

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Master thesis



**Universiteit  
Leiden**  
The Netherlands

# **Competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania: a comparative study**

**Nicolae Cosciug**  
**s2737558**

MSc of Public Administration (Economics and Governance track)  
Leiden University

Under the supervision of Dr. Johan Christensen

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# 1 Introduction

The position of civil servants within national bureaucracies and their relationship with political leaders has been for a long time a topic of interest for scholars interested in public administration (Hondeghem, 2011). These relationships are generally based on 3 key aspects: rewards, competency, and loyalty. Top civil servants offer their knowledge, loyalty, and competency to politicians, who in return provide them with rewards that can be defined as career stability, professional promotions, and responsibility at a high level. This interconnection is often described in the literature using the notion of Public Service Bargains (Hood & Lodge, 2006). However, these bargains can differ considerably across countries. The set of competencies offered by top civil servants, their degree of loyalty, and the rewards they are entitled to, are not homogenous among national European bureaucracies. This happens because countries are subject to their own national administrative traditions and values which greatly influence their preferred administrative approach (Painter & Peters, 2010). Two of the common approaches observed in Europe are the Weberian traditional public administration style and managerial preferred arrangements. The latter approach focuses on effectiveness and efficiency derived from the private sector skills, whereas the former is centered on integrity and neutrality (van der Meer et al., 2013). Based on that, European bureaucracies moved in different directions, therefore the current set of competencies offered by top civil servants varies across countries (Hondeghem, 2011). In some countries, expert knowledge or political skills are the key competencies expected from top civil servants, whereas in others the focus goes on managerial skills that promote mobility, efficiency, etc. Unfortunately, existing research is limited when it comes to empirical studies about the competencies of top civil servants (Kruyen & Genugten, 2019). Moreover, cross-national comparisons of top civil servants' competencies are even rarer since they involve additional challenges. One of them, for instance, is that legal definitions and used terms regarding civil servants often vary across countries, a situation which naturally creates difficulties comparing them (van der Meer et al., 2013). In this thesis, the main goal is to conduct one of these comparative studies, which will focus on the competencies of top civil servants.

Governments stick to specific values that shape the competency of top civil servants. There are different types of competencies observed among European bureaucracies. Historically, public administrative systems adhered to the traditional Weberian approach which focused on technical expertise, administrative skills, preciseness, which together form one type of skill. Newer trends, such as New Public Management ideas required that civil servants have skills such as efficiency, management skills, negotiation skills, etc, which can be grouped as private sector-related competencies (Kruyen &

Genugten, 2019). Besides technical expertise and managerial skills, existing literature suggests that political craft is another competence often demanded from top civil servants since they are commonly involved in the process of decision-making as advisors. Civil servants are required to assess the existing social and political developments from a leadership standpoint and they should foresee and be prepared for potential risks (Bach and Veit, 2017). Partisan loyalty is also a widespread prerequisite that can be common for top civil servants who work in close proximity with the government. Clearly, the competencies of top civil servants can vary across countries since the expected set of skills can evolve in different directions.

This paper will study the competency of the Dutch and Romanian top civil servants and perform a comparative analysis. Despite common trends, such as the process of Europeanization or globalization, which are supposed to converge national bureaucracies, the theoretical framework and the existing studies suggest that the two selected bureaucracies differ significantly in terms of their top civil servants' competency and set of skills (Painter & Peters, 2010). This study will provide insight into the differences between a well-established Western democracy and a post-communist Eastern European country. With this thesis, several goals will try to be reached. First and foremost, this research wants to provide a descriptive overview of the current set of skills and competencies that is characteristic for top civil servants in the analyzed bureaucracies: the Netherlands and Romania. The goal is to present the extent to which technical knowledge and managerial competencies are an attribute for current individuals that hold a high-ranking office as top civil servants. Besides merit-based competencies, the extent to which top civil servants are affiliated to a political group and show proof of political craft will also be presented in this paper. The subsequent goal is to provide a comparative analysis between the two states. Several hypotheses will be formulated and later on tested to see if the expectations are either true or not. Besides the descriptive part, the thesis will bring forth possible explanations that could shed light over the observed variations between the two countries. Based on the indicated goals, the following research question is drawn up:

What are the competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania, and how can we explain the observed differences between these two countries?

The research will make use of existing biographical information in order to provide a discussion about the competencies of top civil servants. In the Netherlands, data will be collected about the Top Management Group within the Algemene Bestuursdienst (ABD), which includes the general secretaries, general directors and other similar positions working for different ministerial departments. This specific group encompasses the Dutch top civil servants. In Romania, data will be collected for the equivalent positions, namely the general secretaries and vice general secretaries working for governmental ministries. The focus of

the research will be laid on their technical expertise, managerial skills and political competencies. The proportion of generalists and specialists in both bureaucracies will be compared, as well as the rate at which bureaucrats in both countries have prior professional experience in the private sector or within a political context. Scientific literature will be used to formulate several expectations and a comparative research design will be applied to test them. The thesis will make use of the collected quantitative data to conduct statistical analyses between the two countries. The differences in the set of skills characteristic for top civil servants from the Netherlands and Romania will be presented, both numerically and graphically.

## 1.1 Academic relevance

The complex relationship between civil servants and politicians has been often addressed in public administration literature (Savoie, 2003; Hood & Lodge, 2006). Undoubtedly, competence and knowledge are essential aspects of the PSBs. However, little research has been done to analyze the competency of top civil servants by using their previous professional experience and educational background. Several scientific publications emphasize the existing gap in the literature about the bargains in terms of *competency* between civil servants and their political agents. Kruyen and Genugten (2019) point out that competency as a variable has received little scholarly attention and few empirical pieces of research had a goal to quantify it. Bach and Veit (2017) explain that the criteria on which top civil servants are appointed by politicians in parliamentary democracies also saw very limited empirical research. The authors comment on the lack of attention on the professional competencies in the research about the appointment of senior civil servants.

Naturally, the existing gap in scientific literature motivates more research about the competency of top civil servants. In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the public service bargains in both the Netherlands and Romania, additional empirical data needs to be collected in the two countries. The demanded set of skills from top civil servants varies across countries, hence a cross-national comparative study can prove to be a relevant addition to the existing academic literature. A comparative analysis based on indicators such as previous work experience and educational background can provide insight into the current discrepancy that Western and Eastern European democracies experience. The findings of the thesis will show which aspects differ significantly across the two nations, and which ones are similar.

For the Dutch case, Steen and Van der Meer (2011) published an article describing the PSBs in the Netherlands. This thesis will provide an update to their work by analyzing

the current professional competency of the Dutch top civil servants. This thesis will be equally a newer addition to other papers whose goal was to study the competency of the Dutch civil servants. For Romanian public administration, existing research and scientific literature are insufficient. Empirical studies regarding the technical and managerial competency of top civil servants in Romania are almost nonexistent. Therefore, collecting data and comparing it with other democracies will be valuable for the scientific literature related to the Romanian public administration. Academic literature generally tends to focus on Western countries, whereas Eastern European countries receive less scholarly attention. Public administrative reforms and the process of politicization received less academic scrutiny in CEE countries compared to the Western states (Meyer-Sahling & Veen, 2012). Research that specifically connects the East and the West part of the continent remains equally limited (Meyer-Sahling & Van Stolk, 2015). Therefore, this paper will present itself as a useful contribution to the academic literature that wants to bridge the two sides of the European continent.

## **1.2 Societal relevance**

Civil servants nowadays are dealing with complex issues since our societies have become increasingly challenging. To keep up with the current demanding realities, they need to have the right set of skills. Yet, it is difficult to say which skills are necessary for a top civil servant that will be able to face the increasing challenges of the future. To have a better understanding of the matter, it is important to analyze the current realities of the national European bureaucracies. This research will bring more insight into the competencies characteristic for top civil servants in two European countries: the Netherlands and Romania. A distinction will be made between expertise knowledge, managerial skills and political competencies. A balance of all these attributes is necessary to overcome today's complex issues, therefore it is important to identify potential gaps in the set of skills that top civil servants have. The results of the research will help identify novel ways to improve the current position of top civil servants and fresh ideas on how to invest resources in new directions. This can be done by modifying the existing recruitment strategies or by offering new training. A more efficient public administration will be beneficial for society as a whole. A comparative study is also relevant since it provides information that is comparable across countries. By having comparable results, national European bureaucracies can learn from each other. New ideas and recommendations can be inspired from other countries that perform better in certain aspects. For instance, a gap in managerial skills of top civil servants can be addressed by following similar policies as those implemented in countries that already achieved better results.



Civil servants work closely with the elected politicians and they hold a huge role in efficiently implementing various essential policies. To attain the best results, it is expected from civil servants to be impartial and well-qualified. However, there are concerns that individuals are appointed for high-level public offices not exactly because of their certified expertise in a relevant area. It might happen that appointments are done on political criteria which creates politicized bureaucracies (Christensen et al., 2014). This thesis will be an additional contribution to the current debate on this matter. It will also provide more insight into the differences between the Western and Eastern parts of the continent. Besides that, political figures happen to be widely discussed by the media and the society. Their background is generally known to the public. However, politicians need the expertise of civil servants in order to implement policies in an organized way. The role of bureaucrats is therefore essential for smooth societal development. Still, they happen to be unknown in the public eye and they do not receive broad media coverage. This research will deliver more information about the individuals that work close to the ministers in the Netherlands and Romania, so that the general public has a better understanding of how these countries are ruled.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

This section introduced the general topic of the thesis and the research question. The academic and societal relevance was explained. To dive deeper into the issue, the existing scientific literature about the topic will be discussed in the second chapter. The theoretical framework will introduce the notion of Public Service Bargains more comprehensively and will elaborate on the existing types of competencies that are specific for a top civil servant and how these competencies vary across countries. Based on the theory, several hypotheses will be formulated. These hypotheses will follow a comparative approach, therefore an appropriate research design will be presented in the third chapter. The section will continue with an explanation of the case selection and with the operationalization of the used variables. How the data will be collected and analyzed will be equally described in that section, together with a discussion about the reliability and the validity of this research. The fourth section will introduce the reader to the empirical part of the thesis. The competencies of top civil servants in the studied countries will be presented and the formulated hypotheses will be tested. The final part of the thesis will include a thorough conclusion that answers the research question, by evaluating the results of the empirical study. The last chapter ends with an explanation of the limitations of this paper and recommendations for further research.

## 2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework will be presented in this chapter and is based on existing scientific literature. Firstly, this section analyzes the work of Hood and Lodge regarding the relationship between civil servants and politicians through the lens of Public Service Bargains and how they have been changing in different countries. Subsequently, the theoretical framework introduces the Weberian theory about bureaucracy and why technical expertise is an essential competency for a civil servant. We then move from the traditional public administration ideas to newer developments. We discuss the New Public Management inspired reforms that shifted the public service bargains in a new direction. The section analyzes the existing theory about this managerial approach and discusses private sector inspired competencies within the national European bureaucracies. After an analysis of newer literature, we understand that technical knowledge and managerial competencies are often complemented with political know-how skills. Merit-based criteria of selection and recruitment can be also replaced with political criteria. The section presents existing literature about politicization and its impact on the competency that civil servants possess. After introducing the 3 types of competencies, the section will discuss how these skills vary across counties. The theoretical framework includes comparative information about Western and Eastern European democracies and provides explanations for the different developments observed within their national bureaucracies.

Using the theoretical arguments, I define four expectations connected with the case study. The expectations relate to the variations of the top civil servants' skills in the Netherlands and Romania and help answer the question: what are the main observed differences in the set of skills and competencies of top civil servants from these two countries? Academic literature also helps explain these variations.

### 2.1 Public Service Bargains

Top civil servants play a key role in the management of the civil services. Their position within national bureaucracies and their close relationship with politicians has been a broad topic approached in the existing scientific literature (Hondeghem, 2011). The role of civil servants and their relationship with the other involved actors are often influenced by various administrative reforms. To analyze these institutional changes, one can look at them from the perspective of Public Service Bargains. PSBs have been widely discussed by Hood and Lodge (2006) in their prominent book *"The Politics of Public Service Bargains? Reward, Competency, Loyalty – and Blame"*, where they defined them as "explicit or implicit agreements between public servants and those they serve" (2006, p. 6). The scholars

describe how politicians and bureaucrats benefit from each other using the concept of PSB. As a norm, politicians expect competency and a degree of loyalty from the top public servants, who at their turn expect a stable working place, responsibility and certain rewards. These bargains include a wide variety of dimensions, they take into consideration the set of skills required from civil servants, the recruitment process, the degree of accountability to which civil servants are subjected, their political neutrality, etc. Using PSBs and their shifts over time and across countries, we can study the functioning of the national public administrations and explain the variations of top civil servants' competencies and skills that are observed in different countries.

According to the authors, the bargains can be analyzed based on: (1) rewards, (2) competency, and (3) loyalty. The rewards represent the benefits that civil servants receive in return for their labor. This aspect includes professional security, pay components and promotions. To get these rewards, a civil servant has to offer their competency to the government, which represents the second dimension of the bargain. Each country has its own public service bargain, therefore the required competency can vary significantly (Hondeghe, 2011). The bargains in terms of competency can be analyzed using the educational background of civil servants, the offered training, etc. As a result, some public servants have more technical skills, whereas others have more managerial skills. Variations in competency represent an essential focus of attention for this thesis. The degree of autonomy between public servants and politicians represents the third aspect of the PSBs, named loyalty. It is often expected from civil servants to be loyal to a specific political goal or minister however, their level of autonomy varies across countries.

The key aspects of the PSB differ among countries. As a result, Hood & Lodge (2006) described in their book two main typologies of the bargaining system: trustee bargain and agency bargain. The former type focuses on a bargain system where civil servants provide their competence in return to operational autonomy, whereas the latter typology implies that politicians act as principles for public servants. These typologies can be used to better understand and study the distinctions in PSBs across countries. New approaches, such as New Public Management reforms contributed to a shift in PSBs. From this managerial perspective, top civil servants working close to the ministers were expected to have more competencies related to the private sector. Since 1980, because of NPM inspired reforms, certain countries adopted a more managerial type of bargain (Hondeghe & Steen, 2013). The described typologies prove that national bureaucracies can move in different directions and have different characteristics. Most countries have a distinct public service bargain, therefore scholars agree that there are variations across countries in terms of what competencies are required from their national top civil servants (Hondeghe, 2011). Some national bureaucracies present predominantly characteristics common for the trustee type of bargain, while others are shaped by the agency bargain type. Different approaches,

such as the traditional Weberian public administration or the New Public Management, shaped the features of the European bureaucracies in different directions. In the subsequent paragraphs, the existing theory about these approaches is presented, and the related set of competencies is defined. Differences in the loyalty aspect of PSBs are also observed across countries. Related to this matter, I discuss the concept of politicization and how both political craft and partisan loyalty could equally be a prerequisite for civil servants.

## 2.2 Types of competencies in Public Bureaucracies

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### 2.2.1 Technical Expertise

In order to understand the connection between the elected politicians and the top civil servants, a primary component of the theory that needs to be studied is the work of Max Weber and, specifically, his model of bureaucracy. According to Weber (1956), a well-trained bureaucrat that possesses sufficient expert knowledge is essential for a modern state that relies on a bureaucratic model of organization. This key element stays at the root of a system that gives power and efficiency to bureaucracies, that are nowadays present in all Western democracies. The primary role of a civil servant is to use their technical expertise to give advice and to implement any decisions that were given to them by a politician. Weber (1956) described two types of knowledge that bureaucrats have: "*Fachwissen*," which represents their superior professional expertise and "*Dienstwissen*," which represents their advanced understanding of how public administration works. This knowledge makes politicians be dependent on the bureaucrats' expertise. In their turn, politicians have authority given "from below" by the people. Since the elected politicians are being often changed, they do not possess enough expert knowledge to implement policies in the most efficient way. Political leadership is often unpredictable, thus Weber believed that neutrality must be a core competence of a civil servant.

Kruyen & Van Genugten (2019) describe the technical competencies expected from a civil servant within the traditional public administration approach. Expertise is listed as a core competence, together with "juridical knowledge," "administrative skills". All decisions should be made in accordance with the national laws and rules, therefore "lawful," "precise" and "conscientious" are other characteristics enumerated by the authors. Equally, civil servants are expected to comply with a hierarchical power structure where politicians give orders (Rhodes, 2005). In this case, we describe bureaucrats as "loyal," "disciplined" and "sensitive to politics".

## **Generalists vs. Specialists**

Using existing literature we can learn the difference between generalist administrators and technical specialists. Normally, a specialist is considered to be a civil servant which has technical expertise in a precise area of activity, acquired after a long process of education and training. On the other hand, a generalist has a broad educational background and does not possess any specific expertise in a narrow domain (Rathore & Fadia, 2008). Some scientists, such as Hoog & Lodge (2006), described technical skills and top-quality expertise as fundamental for any traditional bureaucracy. Other scientists, such as Steen & Van der Meer (2011), think that generalist competencies should prevail over technical skills since bureaucrats are in charge of implementing policies in different administrative areas.

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### **2.2.2 Managerial Skills**

Besides technical expertise, other skills are equally essential for a top civil servant. New developments and settings changed the way bureaucracy was viewed and the set of skills or competencies required from a civil servant often changed over time. Starting with the 1980s, private-sector competencies were more demanded from bureaucrats (Kruyen & Van Genugten, 2019). This change was part of a new set of administrative reforms which was inspired by the New Public Management approach. The set of required skills shifted from procedural rigorousness to efficiency which implied the best allocation of resources (Olsen, 2005). Within NPM, the scholars listed competencies such as “efficiency” and “business-inspired principles” as necessary for any bureaucrat that wants to bring “better value for money”. Aberbach and Christensen (2005) describe the citizens as customers within the New Public Management approach. This implies that they are the main beneficiaries of the services provided by the civil servants within the public sector. The expected set of competencies necessary to please the citizens includes “transparency” and “orientation towards customers” (Kruyen & Van Genugten, 2019).

A fundamental concept of NPM is that within the public sector, civil servants should share similar behaviors as people working in the private sector (De Vries & Nemec, 2003). However, some scholars point out that the core values that are present in a private setting are not necessarily the same as in the public sector. Van der Wal et al. (2008) explain that values such as accountability and lawfulness should be predominantly characteristic for the public sector, whereas values such as profitability and effectiveness should drive the private sector.

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### 2.2.3 Political competencies & Partisan loyalty

It is assumed that administrative neutrality is often undermined by the politicization process present in various Western and Eastern European societies. Studies show that neutrality is more of a myth than empirical reality and this causes a situation where neutral expert knowledge has to coexist with political representativeness (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014). Politicization can be analyzed through different perspectives. It can be done, for instance, through a recruitment process of civil servants that is based on political criteria rather than on a merit-based selection (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Peters (2013) described in his work the different types of recruitment politicization that occur in a bureaucratic model of organization. Two of these typologies include direct politicization, when positions are assigned to people that are loyal to politicians, and professional politicization, which involves the recruitment of technical experts who also happen to be loyal to the system. We distinguish neutral competence, which lays at the base of a merit system bureaucracy, and responsive competence that implies that civil servants will adjust based on politicians' preference (Aberbach & Rockman, 1994).

Since politicization is a reality observed within public services in different countries, we understand that bureaucrats are expected, besides their technical skills and managerial abilities, to have political competencies. Top civil servants are working close to politicians, and they use their knowledge to give constructive advice in the process of decision-making. In this case, political sensitivity becomes an essential competency for senior bureaucrats, since they have to be aware of the existing political conjuncture (Bach & Veit, 2017). Hood and Lodge (2006) described some of the political skills that could be useful to civil servants. They should have a good understanding of the current political leadership and be able to efficiently assess any possible risk or failures that might occur in the future. This set of tasks is part of a political craft ability that is expected from a top civil servant. Political management skills can be acquired through work experience within parliamentary or governmental bodies, or involvement in electoral campaigns (Bach & Veit, 2017). Functional politicization is a term used by scholars to describe the involvement of senior civil servants in the process of policy making, thus their participation in different political processes (Ebinger et al., 2019). However, this type of politicization does not necessarily imply complicity or sympathy for a specific political party (Derlien, 1986).

Political work experience and political know-how skills could come along with partisan loyalty (Veit & Scholz, 2016). Partisan loyalty could equally be a driving force that impacts the recruitment of top civil servants since politicians could have a preference for loyalists when it comes to promotions. An existing research question is whether the promotion of top civil servants is based on their meritocratic skills and political competencies or mostly on their political affiliation and loyalty to a certain political group. To

assess the level of the political affiliation of top civil servants, an examination of their previous work experience can be done.

## **2.3 Variations across countries**

Differences across countries occur due to different national administrative traditions and historical legacies (Painter & Peters, 2010). Scientific literature suggests three distinct paths of how the position of civil servants evolved across countries: “turn to the left,” “turn to the right” and “maintain the status quo”. These several possible paths created a reality where today the competency of top civil servants varies across countries. Van der Meer et al. (2013) performed an analysis of European countries and how their PSBs changed over time. The Netherlands, Switzerland and the Nordic countries have been included in the “turn to the right” group, meaning that their civil service became more similar to the private sector. There is evidence for a shift towards the managerial bargain. This means that, nowadays, managerial competencies are seen as essential prerequisites for top civil servants in those countries. Central and Eastern European countries were included in the “turn to the left” group. National public administrations followed the Weberian approach in those countries. This implies that technical expertise remains the key competency expected from the bureaucrats. Prior to their accession to the EU, CEE countries were required to reform their administrative systems. Many of these requirements aligned with the Weberian ideas of public administration (Goetz, 2011). Germany, Belgium and France maintained the status quo since, according to the authors, there was insufficient evidence that their PSBs are moving towards a more managerial approach. Based on the path national bureaucracies followed, we observe nowadays variations in the top civil servant’s competency. The next paragraphs provide a discussion about how technical expertise, managerial skills, and political responsiveness vary among countries.

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### **2.3.1 Variations in technical expertise**

A pragmatic bureaucracy will prefer generalists over specialists, whereas a systemic system will have a preference for specialists. As a result, the type of bargain system strongly affects the proportion of generalists and specialists within the civil service. Since every country has its own public service bargain with its own characteristics, the number of generalists and specialists will vary across nations. For instance, a study done by Marion Fourcade (2010) concluded that there are big differences between France, the UK and the US when it comes to the role of economists. The author provided arguments which explained that France has a long tradition of employing technocrats with a broad education in economics, political sciences and law, thus generalists. The US was described as a specialist bureaucracy and the UK as having a more generalist civil service. This could be explained by the different recruitment practices carried out within national administrative

systems (Christensen, 2015). Christensen explains that a recruitment system where the emphasis is placed on general competencies will build a generalistic identity, whereas a professional identity will be built on a recruitment system that focuses on previous professional and educational background.

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### 2.3.2 Variations in managerial skills

Besides technical knowledge, managerial skills have also become an essential requirement for top civil servants in some countries. This type of skills has been promoted by the New Public Management approach. However, studies reveal that NPM reforms were implemented differently across nations. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, countries like the Netherlands and Belgium were at the beginning of implementing ideas of the competency management approach in their administrative systems. France was recognizing the need for a new model, and Eastern European countries, transitioning from their communist past to market economies, were focusing on adopting a more traditional public administration system (Horton et al., 2002). The need to change the classic bureaucratic model in France and the desire to create a system of public service that is able to overcome new challenges in the Netherlands were listed as some reasons for introducing a new competency management approach (Op de Beeck & Hondeghe, 2010). In general, administrative changes related to NPM ideas are common in most European countries, however, their intensity differs. Measuring the impact and intensity of the NPM approach across countries proved to be a very difficult task to do (Wright, 1994). Nevertheless, managerial skills are believed to be a more pivotal prerequisite for civil servants in countries which adopted NPM ideas earlier, compared to the ones that focused on building a more traditional public administrative system.

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### 2.3.3 Variations in political loyalty & competency of responsiveness

Hix & Høyland (2011) describe the relationship between civil servants and politicians as being a principal-agent one. It means that bureaucrats prefer to have as much independence as possible and politicians want to control that the policies implemented by the civil servants correspond to their preference. To make sure that top civil servants have responsive competencies, elected officials are sometimes involved in the selection process of individuals for high-ranked civil positions. The level of political involvement differs across countries and it usually depends on the country's national history and on the way the administrative system was built. Generally, countries with well-established democratic systems can afford more political involvement than the newer democracies (Kuperus & Rode, 2010). We observe a fusion between the administrative and political sides, which increases the political pressure put on civil servants (Ágh, 2013).



Montpetit (2011, p. 1259) describes that in developing Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), “the attitude of civil servants in developing public policy is more likely to be indistinguishable from that of actors who have political functions”. This can be explained using the historical institutionalism approach, which studies how timing and “path dependencies” shape institutions and outcomes (Steinmo, 2008). We can do that because administrative traditions vary across countries due to the different historical contexts. The reason why politicization is more present in CEE countries could be explained by the fact that the impact of the New Public Management approach was smaller in Eastern European countries compared to the Western ones. By the time the NPM ideas reached the Eastern part of the continent, they already faced numerous criticisms in the West, therefore their implementation was slowed down (Rochet, 2010; Heinrich, 2011). In the last couple of decades, numerous changes have been observed in the administrative systems of the CEE countries, however, scholars assume that very few of them can be linked to the NPM reforms (Pal, 2010). Other trends, such as the Neo-Weberian one, might have had a bigger impact on the development of those administrative systems (Ágh, 2013). A Neo-Weberian approach involves both business-like values together with a more traditional hierarchical and legalistic approach (Raadschelders, 2016).

When it comes to the Dutch public administration, it was labeled by Hood and Lodge (2006) as a system built on public service bargains that can be described as consociational, therefore a system which is based on the cooperation of different social groups. For the top civil servants to work independently and professionally, they have a degree of autonomy from politicians. However, various political and administrative changes occurred in the Netherlands in the last decades (Steen & Van der Meer, 2011). As a result, PSBs experienced some reforms, due to managerialization and fragmentation, and public servants were expected to act in a more enterprising way, and they have more autonomy than civil servants in other countries, namely CEE countries.

## **2.4 Hypotheses**

Scientific literature helps us formulate several expectations. By using the theoretical background, we can construct several hypotheses based on these expectations. These hypotheses will help answer the main research question: what are the competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania and how can the differences between these two countries, if any, be explained? The Netherlands is a Western country that is a founding member of the European Union, whereas Romania is a post-communist Eastern European country that only joined the politico-economic block in 2007. Romanian public administration shares common characteristics with most CEE countries (Nemec, 2010). The Dutch national bureaucracies evolved differently, therefore it has different features. The

expectations are shaped based on existing literature about technical knowledge, managerial competencies, party affiliation and political craft of the top civil servants.

### **1) Technical skills & expertise**

The first expectation is based on the relationship between the administrative traditions in a particular country and the technical skills of the civil servants working within that country's administrative system. Some bureaucracies have a preference for generalists, whereas others prefer specialists. Central and Eastern European countries distinguish themselves with their communist past. Before the 1990s, the general tradition was that all civil servants were expected to be specialists, therefore bureaucrats had limited professional mobility. Generalists were not present in the public administration systems and all the coordination within departments was done at the level of the national communist parties. These tendencies were inherited by the Eastern European countries, where the majority of civil servants are experts only in a narrow area (Bodea & Creța, 2005). The situation is different in the Netherlands, which is a well-established Western democracy. The Dutch public administration was built to promote interdepartmental mobility, which is a relatively unique feature among European countries. Generally, top civil servants must switch the department they work for every seven years (van der Meer & Raadschelders, 2014). This policy intended to switch more specialists into generalists. Using the relevant literature and considering the administrative traditions and historical differences between the two countries, we can draw the following hypothesis:

H1.1: Top civil servants in the Netherlands are more likely to have a generalist background than top civil servants in Romania.

H1.2: Top civil servants in Romania are more likely to be specialists in a narrow domain than top civil servants in the Netherlands.

### **2) Private sector competencies**

The second expectation is linked to the New Public Management and how the reforms associated with this approach impacted the competencies that civil servants have in different countries. NPM is related to several trends that took place in the national European public administration systems starting from 1980 and onwards. These trends have been described by numerous scholars, such as Pollitt (1990) who wrote about managerialism, Barzelay & Armajani (1992) who described the functioning of a market-based public administration and Hughes (1998) who explained the concept of an entrepreneurial government. Studies show that NPM trends were adopted differently in each country of continental Europe (Pollitt et al., 2007). The Netherlands, although not the most prominent country that embraced the NPM approach, saw a significant shift towards

the new managerial ideas (Hood, 1995). Therefore, the Dutch public service experienced a set of changes that required more managerial competencies from their bureaucrats. “Reforms at all levels of government during the 1980s were aimed at efficiency gains and reconsideration of public expenditures” (van Mierlo, 1998, p. 335). The impact of the NPM reforms was smaller in Eastern European countries, especially compared to the Western democracies (Ágh, 2013). The example of Romania shows us that the country inherited a centralized post-communist public service system which was late in adopting NPM reforms compared to the Netherlands. Prior to the EU accession in 2007, NPM ideas were required by the European Commission from the Romanian government in order for it to meet the EU accession requirements. However, most of the implemented reforms were not purely NPM inspired (Dan & Pollitt, 2015). Based on existing literature and studies we can expect that the NPM approach had a less significant impact on the Romanian public service, therefore Romanian bureaucrats could lack businesslike competencies and a managerial mindset. We can formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Top civil servants in the Netherlands have more managerial skills than top civil servants in Romania.

### **3) Party affiliation & Political craft**

Politicization within the civil service is an existing reality within many administrative systems. The degree of separation between politics and public administration differs between countries, therefore a comparative analysis is useful in understanding why, in some countries, bureaucrats are more frequently associated with a political party than in other countries. The third hypothesis will rest on the administrative traditions within a country’s public administration and the level of politicization that is observed. Politicians are sometimes limited when it comes to how they can influence the public service. Depending on the administrative traditions and the general settings of the civil service, politicians can or cannot use certain tools to control the civil servants (Peters & Pierre, 2004). The Netherlands is believed to be a country whose public service is not hugely controlled by politics. “Top-down politicization in the Netherlands is not so much sought in increasing or introducing party political nominations, changing existing structures or manipulating decision-making forums” (van der Meer, 2004, p. 223). Some scholars confirm the reality that Dutch civil servants are sometimes affiliated with a political group, but the general degree of politicization is relatively low (van Thiel, 2012). The politicization phenomenon is also studied by scholars, in the Eastern part of the European continent. Some studies suggest that CEE countries experience a higher level of politicization, and their merit-based recruitment system is not as lucrative as in the Western countries (Staronová & Adamicová, 2016). Considering the current scientific literature, we expect different levels of politicization in the Netherlands and Romania, therefore we can formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: Top civil servants in the Netherlands are less likely to be affiliated with a political party than top civil servants in Romania.

Political loyalty shouldn't be confused with political craft, which for top civil servants is often "an indispensable prerequisite for performing their role successfully" (Goetz, 1997, p. 754). In countries that are mainly ruled by multi-party governments, political craft becomes a key requirement for senior civil servants since the bureaucrats have to react swiftly to new developments (Goetz, 1997). In the Netherlands usually, the ruling coalition is formed out of more political parties than in Romania. As a result, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H4: Top civil servants in the Netherlands have more political craft than top civil servants in Romania.

## **2.5 Conceptual framework**

By studying the existing theory, we understand that the competencies of top civil servants vary across countries. The Netherlands and Romania experienced different administrative reforms and the public service bargains differ in these two democracies. Some bureaucracies have a preference for generalists, while others prefer specialists. By analyzing the historical developments of the Dutch and Romanian public service systems, we expect that Dutch civil servants are predominantly generalists, whereas the Romanian ones tend to be more specialists (H1). New Public Management ideas also had a different impact on these two countries. It is expected that Dutch civil servants possess more managerial competencies than Romanian civil servants (H2). In CEE countries, politicization influences the public administrative systems differently than in Western democracies. Existing scientific literature suggests that, in Romania, civil servants are more often associated with a political party (H3). However, since the Dutch political system is more diverse, we expect that Dutch top civil servants will possess more political craft than top civil servants in Romania (H4). An empirical analysis will be done in order to test these expectations. In the next chapter, the dependent variables linked to these expectations will be conceptualized and the research design will be explained. In the fourth chapter, I will empirically test the expectations and a discussion about the results will be made. Table 1 below summarizes the expectations by stating the independent variables of the model and their relevant dependent variables. These independent variables will not be directly studied in this paper. The aim of this research is to examine the observable implications of the arguments explained in this chapter. Data about top civil servants will be collected to find whether the formulated expectations are true or not.

**Table 1: Conceptual table: independent and dependent variables**

Independent variable	Dependent variable
Historical legacy & Administrative traditions	<p>Amount of technical skills that top civil servants have</p> <p>H1.1: Top civil servants in the Netherlands are more likely to have a generalist background than top civil servants in Romania.</p> <p>H1.2: Top civil servants in Romania are more likely to be specialists in a narrow domain than top civil servants in the Netherlands.</p>
Intensity of NPM reforms	<p>Amount of managerial skills that top civil servants have</p> <p>H2: Top civil servants in the Netherlands have more managerial skills than top civil servants in Romania.</p>
Administrative traditions & Political culture	<p>Amount of top civil servants affiliated with a political party.</p> <p>H3: Top civil servants in the Netherlands are less likely to be affiliated with a political party than top civil servants in Romania.</p>
Administrative traditions & Political system	<p>Level of political craft that top civil servants have</p> <p>H4: Top civil servants in the Netherlands have more political craft than top civil servants in Romania.</p>

## **3 Research design and Methodology**

In this section, the methodology that this paper follows will be explained. Firstly, I describe the research design that will be used for this thesis. Next, the case selection will be explained together with the research population of the study. After that, the dependent and independent variables will be presented and operationalized. To test the hypotheses mentioned in the previous section, data needs to be collected and analyzed, hence this section will also explain which methods will be used for that. The chapter ends with a discussion about the validity and reliability of the employed data and the methods of analysis.

### **3.1 Research design**

The goal of this research is to get more insight into the competencies of top civil servants within two national bureaucracies, and then compare them. In other words, the paper will analyze two real-life contexts to gain an in-depth understanding of what features are characteristic to them. The research design used in this paper will be a quantitative statistical analysis of data collected from two countries. The two cases selected for this research are the Netherlands and Romania, hence the thesis involves a comparative study on a cross-national level. In order to measure the variations in competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania, biographical information will be collected and systemized in a data set. With this quantitative data, different mean comparison analyses will be run, so that the formulated hypotheses can be tested. Several tests of proportions will be conducted to test the statistical difference between the two selected populations. This will represent the descriptive part of the analysis, where the educational and previous professional background of top civil servants is presented, and compared between the two countries. The analysis will follow a quantitative approach. The results will be reported and explanations for the findings will be provided.

### **3.2 Case selection & Research population**

After formulating the research question, it is important to carefully define the studied cases. Geographically we focus on the Netherlands and Romania, and the time period covered in this research is spring 2021. Later in this chapter, we discuss how the data was collected. It is particularly interesting to select two cases that will display different characteristics. Historical contexts and national administrative traditions differ in the Netherlands compared to Romania. The intensity of the NPM reforms also varies in these two countries. Nevertheless, the Netherlands and Romania share some similarities. Both

countries are members of the EU, therefore they must adapt to the administrative requirements set by the EC. Prior to Romania's accession to the EU, the Romanian government had to conduct reforms in their public administration system to achieve a level of performance that allowed them to become a member of the union (Dimitrova, 2002). In theory, the process of Europeanization and globalization would result in a convergence of public administrative systems among countries (Painter & Peters, 2010). However, evidence suggests that national public bureaucracies among EU members present a lot of differences. The Weberian and NPM administrative ideas have spread among most EU countries. Nevertheless, we can observe different results of how these ideas were implemented across countries. Competencies and the set of skills that civil servants possess vary in Romania and the Netherlands. A quantitative statistical analysis will be useful in measuring these variations. It is especially interesting to study the variations between Western and Eastern European countries and to find potential explanations to them.

In the Netherlands, the research will focus on the Top Management Group within the Algemene Bestuursdienst, which currently consists of 90 positions. These positions include the general secretaries, general directors, directors, and inspectors employed at different Dutch ministries. The research will include data about the current individuals that work as top civil servants within the civil service in the Netherlands, hence spring 2021. By analyzing the top civil servants, we focus on high-ranked positions that work closely with appointed ministers, therefore they are particularly susceptible to be politically affiliated to a political group. Individuals employed within the TMG hold a lot of responsibility, for that reason, it is particularly relevant to look into their competencies and skills. They have a role as policy-makers and advisors (Raadschelders & Van der Meer, 2014).

It is equally useful and relevant to analyze what competencies are specific for the current Romanian senior civil servants, and how Romanian public administration moved from the post-communist past. According to the Romanian Law nr. 188/1999, general secretaries and vice general secretaries working for the government and all the other ministries are considered as senior civil servants. The research will mainly focus on the individuals that hold these offices, as well as other positions that work in close collaboration with the ministers. These positions tend to be often politically influenced since there is evidence that individuals holding these offices are the first to be replaced when new political parties come to power (Alexe, 2013). For this reason, it is particularly useful to dig into the backgrounds of these individuals and to analyze their set of skills.

For both Romania and the Netherlands, data will be collected for positions that are closely connected to the ministries and hold a role in the process of decision making. Also, in both countries, senior public servants are responsible for the managerial aspects within their department. Since they hold similar responsibilities, it is relevant to analyze how the

set of skills and competencies varies among them. Equally, for these high-ranked positions, data will be more easily accessible on publicly available sources since this information is of public interest. The CVs of top civil servants are often published on ministerial websites. From the 90 individuals included in the Dutch TMG group, sufficient data could not be collected for 2 of them, therefore the number of observations for the Netherlands is  $n = 88$ . For the Romanian case, the defined study population included 96 individuals and biographical information could be collected for  $n = 84$ .

### 3.3 Operationalization

Each variable that I will study needs to be operationalized in order to be able to measure them. Top civil servants' competencies will be quantified so that the research can provide information about the variations between the two countries.

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#### 3.3.1 Dependent variables

##### Technical knowledge

Regarding the technical expertise of the national top civil servants, the field of study and the level of education will be key indicators. The field of study is equally an indicator of whether the civil servants are generalists or specialists for their ministerial departments. First and foremost, we research the field in which the top civil servants received their education. Each domain will be quantified using a nominal variable, which will follow as such: (1) for Law, (2) for Economics, (3) for Political Sciences or Public Administration (4) for Business Administration (5) for Engineering, (6) for Humanities (such as Literature, Philosophy, Art degrees, etc), (7) for Medicine, (8) for Natural sciences (such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc), and (9) for other academic disciplines. The value will be selected based on the discipline that the civil servant studied the most during their university studies period.

To verify the first expectation, a clear distinction needs to be made between who is considered to be a generalist and a specialist. Generalist graduates have transferable work skills that can be applied to various sectors. Specialists have expertise in a narrower discipline. (0) will be assigned for generalists, whereas (1) will be attributed to specialists. If the bureaucrat received education in a thematic field of study related to the department they work in, they will also be coded as (1), since thematic education is an indicator of professional expertise and specialization in a specific area. For instance, a top civil servant that obtained their education in international relations and who works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be considered a specialist. On the other hand, a top civil servant whose degree is not directly connected to the ministry they currently work at will be considered a



generalist, hence (0) will be attributed to them. Most commonly, law, economics, and public administration degrees are considered generalist degrees. Nevertheless, if one of these degrees is in line with the responsibilities of a certain ministry, the variable will be coded as (1). For instance, individuals with economics degrees working for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management will be considered generalists. An individual with a similar educational background working for the Ministry of Finance will be viewed as a specialist. Any top civil servant that did not receive thematic education relevant for the department they are employed at will be considered a generalist.

In order to assess the general level of expertise, it is important to study the highest level of education that top civil servants received. This variable will be based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) maintained by UNESCO. ISCED 2011 levels of education that will be used in our research, and their assigned code are the following: (0) Any type of secondary education or lower, (1) Bachelor's or equivalent, (2) Master's or equivalent, (3) Doctoral or equivalent. Uncompleted degrees will not be taken into considerations. A value will be assigned for each civil servant based on the highest level of education they followed and completed.

Analyzing top civil servants' highest level of education and their field of study is not enough to draw a complete image of their level of expertise. Their previous work experience is equally relevant. I will research whether the civil servants have prior work experience in the same field of activity as the department where they work at. If the civil servant has at least 2 years of relevant work experience before they entered their office, (1) will be assigned to them otherwise, it will be (0). For instance, if the Dutch General Secretary working for the Ministry of Health, Wellbeing, and Sports has previous professional experience related to healthcare management, medicine or sports, (1) will be assigned to them or else, it will be (0).

### **Managerial competency**

New Public Management reforms focus on private-sector competencies since the approach implies that the public administration system should be run as a business (Hood, 1995). For this reason, this research will look into the previous work experience of the top civil servants, and specifically their experience within the private sector. I include a binary variable named "Private sector experience," which will be coded as (1) if the civil servant has at least 2 years of prior professional experience in the private sector, or (0) if the condition is not satisfied and the civil servant does not have previous experience in the private sector.

The managerial model of public administration promotes interdepartmental mobility among top civil servants. Therefore, another indicator of managerial competency among top civil servants is the frequency of them switching the sector they are employed at. I add

the variable “interdepartmental mobility” which will be coded as (0) if the top civil servant worked for the same ministry during his entire career. Every time the bureaucrat switches to a different department, the attributed value increases by one unit. This variable is also useful when analyzing the proportion of generalists within the senior public administration. Bureaucrats working for multiple ministries could potentially be considered as having a generalist background since their skills are transferable among sectors.

**Political craft & Partisan loyalty**

In order to quantify the political craft of the top civil servants, I will use the description provided by Back & Veit (2017) and I will operationalize this variable in a similar way. The scholars relate political craft to previous work experience within support units for national or provincial executive bodies. State-level positions, such as private assistants, state secretary, etc are included too. Previous work experience within the prime minister’s office is also taken into consideration. The variable will be coded as follows: (1) for those top civil servants that show proof of at least 1 year of the described professional experience and (0) for those who do not.

Political affiliation and previous work experience for a political party show proof of partisan loyalty. I include the “Political affiliation” variable, which will be coded as (1) if the top civil servant has ties to the ruling political parties. The same value will be attributed if they have worked in the past for the ruling political parties, for at least 2 years. The variable will be based on data collected from diverse news outlets, interviews, and other independent sources.

**Table 2: Operationalization of dependent variables**

Variable	Indicator	Measurement
<b>Technical expertise</b>		
Field of study	Disciplinary background of the top civil servant.	(1) Law (2) Economics (3) Political Sciences or Public Administration (4) Business Administration (5) Engineering (6) Humanities (7) Medicine (8) Natural sciences (9) other academic disciplines

Generalist vs. Specialist background	Thematic education will be considered as specialist background. If the top civil servant's educational background is not directly connected to their department, they will be considered generalists.	Generalist (0) Specialist (1)
Level of education	Highest level of education the top civil servant completed.	(0) Any type of secondary education or lower (1) Bachelor's or equivalent (2) Master's or equivalent (3) Doctoral or equivalent
Relevance of previous work experience	Previous professional experience relevant to the department where the top civil servant holds an office.	Relevant (1) Not relevant (0)
<b>Managerial competency</b>		
Private sector experience	More than 2 years of work experience in the private sector.	Yes (1) No (0)
Interdepartmental mobility	Amount of times the bureaucrat switched the ministerial department they are employed at.	Never (0) 1 time (1) 2 times (2) ... etc.
<b>Political craft</b>	The bureaucrat has worked in support units for the political leadership or within the office of the prime minister or other ministries.	Yes (1) No (0)
<b>Political affiliation</b>	The bureaucrat has ties to one of the political parties in charge of the government, or previously worked for one of those political party.	Yes (1) No (0)

### 3.3.2 Independent variables

This research considers the country where top civil servant works as the independent variable. A dummy variable will be created for each of the studied countries. The Netherlands will be coded as (0) and Romania will be coded as (1). Both of these countries have specific administrative traditions that shaped the features of their national public administrations and the competencies of their top bureaucrats. These types of traditions are defined as structures and ideas that shape the developments of public administrative systems. Painter & Peters (2010) define 4 variables that differentiate administrative traditions: relationships with society, relationships with political institutions,

legalistic traditions in contrast to the managerial approach and the accountability of civil servants. In this research, it is assumed that administrative traditions shaped the competencies of top civil servants and the level of politicization present among them. It is difficult to measure these variables since they represent abstract concepts. Therefore, the independent variable will be simply the country where the top civil servant holds an office. Both countries have different historical legacies, political cultures and values, which at their turn, influence the set of skills that top civil servants possess. The intensity of NPM reforms also varies across these countries.

### **3.4 Data collection**

All the information about top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania will be collected using online sources. Subsequently, the collected data will be systemized in a data set, so it can be analyzed. It is necessary to find information about the educational background and the previous work experience of the bureaucrats to test the formulated hypotheses. Most of it can be found by consulting the publicly available CVs of the bureaucrats. I will use multiple sources, which are listed below, to collect the data.

For the Netherlands, one of the major used sources will be [parlement.com](http://parlement.com). According to the description of the website, the information published on the platform can be used for research purposes. Biographies and personal information of civil servants are available. The website provides independent information, therefore it is a reliable source to use for this thesis. To find the list of top civil servants in the Netherlands, I will use the information available on the official website of the ABD. On their website, information about civil servant's educational background and previous work experience can be equally found. Furthermore, additional sources, such as LinkedIn, will be used to add any information that is lacking on those websites. LinkedIn is an online social media platform used for professional purposes. Biographical information, if available, will be collected and added to the data set. Using these sources, most of the data will be collected. To complete the data set, additional internet searches will be done. CVs of civil servants can be often found on different national websites.

For Romania, the first used source of information will be [gov.ro](http://gov.ro), the official website of the Romanian government. On their website, CVs are uploaded for all general secretaries working for the government. Additionally, the website provides a list of all the Romanian ministries and their corresponding websites. On these official websites, biographical information can be found for most top civil servants working for the Romanian ministries. After collecting the relevant names, I will use the information available on these platforms to collect data about top civil servants' educational background and their previous professional experience. For most individuals, a publicly available CV is available on the

website. LinkedIn will be used to complete the data set, just like for the Dutch case. Additional information about the bureaucrats will be found by analyzing news articles available on the Internet. National newspapers often write about changes that occur at the level of national ministries, and provide information about the background of newly appointed top civil servants. The data set will be completed with information collected from other reliable online sources.

### **3.5 Methods of analysis**

After collecting the data and creating a data set, we need to analyze it to test our hypotheses. The main used method will be a quantitative comparative analysis that will focus on descriptive comparisons. The collected data about the educational background and previous professional experience of top civil servants will provide an overview of the set of skills and competencies that they have. Descriptive statistics will be used to create a general outline of the current situation observed in the Dutch and Romanian bureaucracies. Therefore, the collected data will be first individually presented for both countries. Besides presenting the numerical values, data will be visually demonstrated with the use of statistical graphs.

After analyzing both cases, an answer will be provided to the question: what competencies are most common within national public administrative systems in the Netherlands and Romania. Subsequently, both cases need to be compared with each other. The goal of the paper is to find statistically significant differences between the two nations. Several statistical descriptive comparisons will be performed. A comparison of means is useful for this type of research. For this reason, a two sample z test of proportions will be done. This type of statistical analysis is useful in comparing several proportions observed in our two study cases and in quantifying potential differences that are observed. A z test analysis works by rejecting the null hypothesis. In our case, the general null hypothesis will be that top civil servants' competencies are equal in both Romania and the Netherlands, and no statistical difference is found between them. Differences between the two studied cases can be considered significant if the z test analysis results in a p-value that equals ,05 or less (Toshkov, 2016). A confidence interval of 95% will be used in this research. In case the variable is not based on a proportion, alternative statistical tests will be used to test the variations between the two countries. A chi-square test of independence or Mann–Whitney U test will be used for variables that do not follow a binomial distribution.

The collected data will be systemized in Excel, and the software will be also used to generate descriptive statistics. Additional internet resources and online statistical platforms will be used to perform the statistical tests relevant to our data.

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

After discussing the research design, the variables, and how I will collect and analyze the data, it is important to deliberate about the reliability and validity of this thesis. Ensuring reliability implies that future research, done by other scholars, using similar methods and similar data will result in similar results as being presented in this research (Toshkov, 2016). Moreover, measurements done for this research should be as precise as possible (internal validity), and ideally results should be generalized to other populations (external validity). Internal validity needs to be taken into consideration during the research process since variations across countries can be linked to different explanatory variables. For this thesis, the main explanatory variables are administrative traditions, which seem at first to be a broad one, not easily measurable. However, based on existing scientific literature, a strong cause-and-effect relationship can be drawn between the dependent and independent variables.

Measuring the competencies of top civil servants is not as straightforward as we would like it to be. Therefore, additional indicators have to be included in order to quantify the studied skills and competencies. It could be that some biographical indicators do not measure competency in the most accurate way. For instance, managerial competencies could be very well acquired within the public sector and not only at a private firm level. Since the selected indicators may not be perfect for certain competencies, we cannot exclude some potential bias. To ensure internal validity as much as possible, the way of measuring top civil servants' competency is inspired from existing research papers. The operationalization of variables is based on reasonings that have been already used by scholars. Despite certain limitations, the indicators used for this research will help draw a general overview of the studied cases and the potential biases should not be significant.

By researching the competencies of the top civil servants, in both Romania and the Netherlands, we focus on individuals that share similar positions and hold comparable responsibilities. In both countries, the researched group includes a limited number of individuals that hold comparable offices and data will be collected for them. In this case, selection bias becomes an insignificant threat to our research since data will be collected for most civil servants that occupy a high-ranked position within the national bureaucracies of the studied cases.

The concept of generalization is also a potential issue for this research since it is difficult to ensure that the results of this thesis can be generalized to other Western or CEE countries. Each national bureaucracy has different characteristics and values that can count as potential explanatory variables for the variations of their top civil servants' competency. However, existing literature emphasizes the similarities of the public administrative

bureaucracies among CEE countries. Therefore, a comparative study between the Netherlands and Romania could be generalized to other Eastern European countries with a similar historical legacy. The main purpose of the research is, nevertheless, a comparative and explanatory one. The results of the research focus on two specific cases and should not be easily generalized to other states, hence generalization is not a primary goal of the thesis. Although the findings of this research cannot be easily applied to other cases, the research is replicable. The collected and analyzed data is publicly available on trustworthy online sources. A similar study could be performed by other scholars interested in the subject. Additional comparative studies done for different time periods, for the same selected cases, could provide additional reliability for the research.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics & Empirical Results

This chapter includes the descriptive part of the analysis. Descriptive statistics will be presented for top civil servants that hold an office in April 2021 in the Netherlands and Romania. The collected information concerns their previous educational background and professional experience. This information is necessary to obtain a complete overview of the top civil servants' competency. The sample size includes  $n = 88$  individuals working in the Netherlands and  $n = 84$  individuals working in Romania. The total number of studied cases ended up being 174. Each variable is presented and the variations across the two countries are tested on whether they are statistically significant or not. The hypotheses together with their answers are discussed at the end of the section.

#### 1) Educational background

The educational background of the top civil servants was operationalized as a categorical variable, ranging from 1 to 9, without any intrinsic order. The number of total observations includes 174 individuals; 84 Dutch top civil servants and 88 Romanian top civil servants. The collected data is presented in the table below:

**Table 3: Top civil servants' educational background frequency**

		The Netherlands, frequency n, (%)	Romania, frequency n, (%)
1	Law	19 (21,59)	17 (20,24)
2	Economics	21 (23,86)	18 (21,43)
3	Political sciences/ Public administration	23 (26,14)	18 (21,43)
4	Business Administration	3 (3,41)	4 (4,76)
5	Engineering	4 (4,55)	11 (13,10)
6	Humanities	7 (7,95)	3 (3,57)
7	Medicine	3 (3,41)	2 (2,38)
8	Natural sciences	3 (3,41)	3 (3,57)
9	Other disciplines	5 (5,68)	8 (9,52)
	Total	88 (100)	84 (100)



The educational background represents the discipline that top civil servants studied the most during their university period. An overwhelming majority of senior civil servants in both countries obtained their degrees at the following three faculties: Law, Economics studies, Political Studies or Public administration studies. Combined together, more than 70% of the Dutch senior civil servants graduated in one of these disciplines. Slightly less, but still a strong majority, 60% of the Romanian senior public servants equally graduated with these degrees. However, some distinctions can be observed among other disciplines. Engineering seems to be a field of study which is more common for the Romanian public administration. Approximately 13% of the studied individuals in Romania are certified engineers. This number is cut by more than half in the Netherlands. A number of academic disciplines, such as security studies, computer sciences or any other uncommon discipline for a top civil servant were included in the last category. The data shows that about 9% of Romanian civil servants were included in this category, whereas the Dutch relative frequency lays at around 6%. This suggests that Romanian top civil servants have a slightly more diversified educational background than their Dutch counterparts.

In order to test whether there is a significant statistical relationship between the collected categorical variables and the top civil servants' country of origin, a chi-square test of independence is suitable. However, this method of analysis presents several limitations since it is sensitive to the sample size (Preacher, 2001). To increase the reliability of the analysis and to be able to perform the chi-square test of independence, the following disciplines will be grouped together: Economics together with Business Administration studies, and Medicine together with Natural sciences studies. The following contingency table is obtained:

**Table 4: Educational background contingency table**

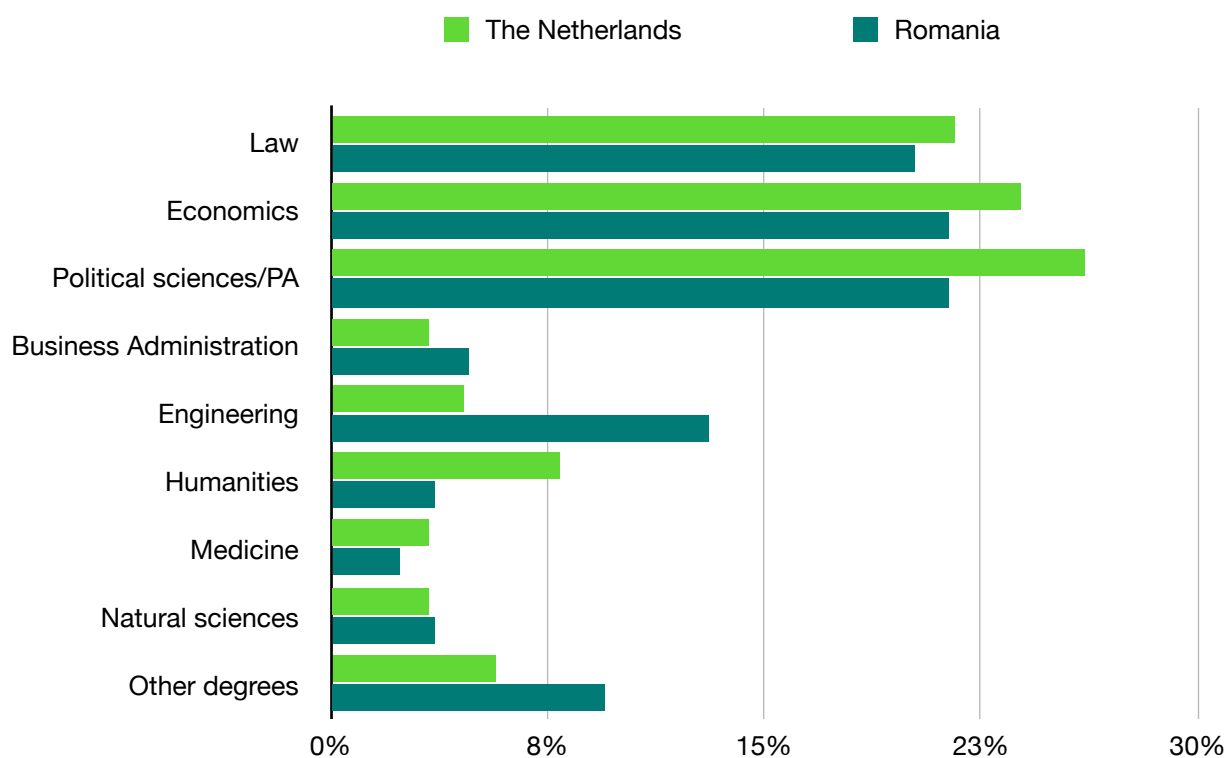
	The Netherlands, n	Romania, n	Both
1) Law	19	17	36
2) Economics and 4) Business Administration	24	22	46
3) Political Sciences/ Public Administration	23	18	41
5) Engineering	4	11	15
6) Humanities	7	3	10
7) Medicine and 8) Natural sciences	6	5	11
9) Other disciplines	5	8	13
Total	88	84	172

After conducting a chi-square statistical test, the following results are reported:

$$X^2(6, N = 172) = 6,36, p = 0,3832.$$

In this case, the null hypothesis would be that there is no association between the distribution of the educational background of the top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania. With a p-value of 0,38, higher than the level of significant  $\alpha = 0,05$  and chi-square statistic  $X^2 = 6,36$ , lower than the critical value  $X^2 = 15,50$ , we fail to reject the null hypothesis. No association was found between the country of origin and the distribution of the educational background, hence top civil servants follow similar educational trends in both countries. The small variations can be observed in the following bar graph:

**Figure 1: Comparative bar graph: educational background**



Frequency (%) of top civil servants per educational background: comparative bar graph

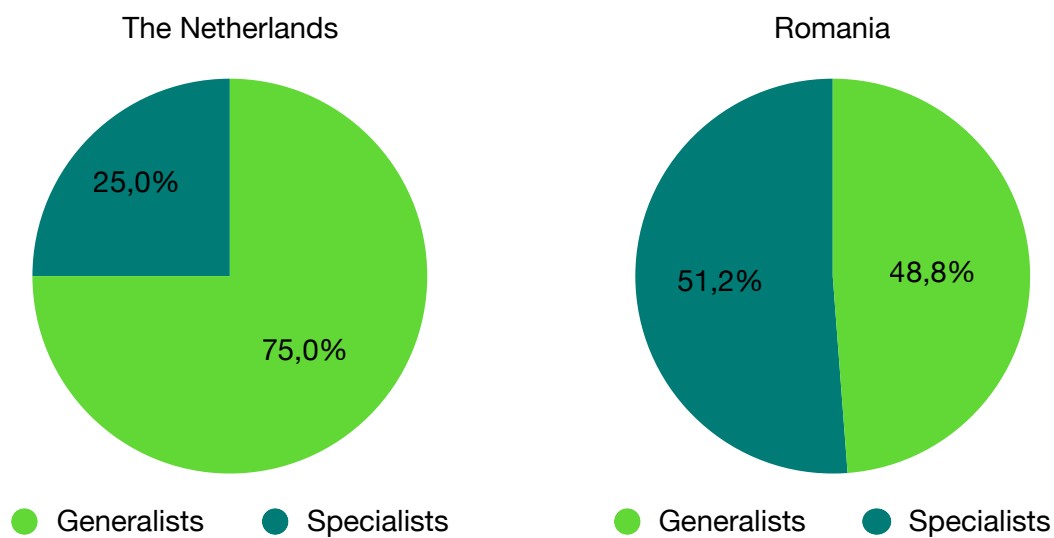
## 2) Generalists vs Specialists

In the next step, we analyze the proportion of specialists and generalists between the Dutch and Romanian public administration systems. This binary variable takes two values: (0) for Generalists and (1) for Specialists. The value for each civil servant was selected based on their degree and the relevancy of their educational background for their current position. The collected data is presented numerically in table 5, and graphically in figure 2.

**Table 5: Frequency of generalists and specialists**

	The Netherlands, frequency n, (%)	Romania, frequency n, (%)
<i>Generalists</i>	66 (75%)	41 (48,8%)
<i>Specialists</i>	22 (25%)	43 (51,2%)
<i>Total</i>	88 (100%)	84 (100%)

**Figure 2: Pie charts: Distribution of generalists vs. specialists in the NL and RO**



To compare the two populations, a z test of proportion will be used. The sample size is greater than 30 in both countries, and the samples are independent of each other, therefore this method of analysis is appropriate.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics, Generalists (0) vs Specialists (1)**

	The Netherlands	Romania
<i>Mean</i>	0,25	0,51
<i>Mode</i>	0	1
<i>Variance</i>	0,18	0,25
<i>Observations</i>	88	84
<i>Hypothesized Mean Difference</i>	0	
<i>Z statistic</i>	3,541	
<i>P value (two-tail)</i>	0,0004	

A majority of the Dutch civil servants have a generalist background and only one quarter of them can be considered specialists for the department where they hold an office at. On the other side, in Romania, a little over half of the top civil servants have a specialist background. The null hypothesis is that the two populations are equal, therefore the proportion of generalists and specialists is equal in both countries. The obtained p value is 0,0004 which has a lower value than the significance level which is set at ,05. In this case, the null hypothesis is rejected, hence there is a statistically significant difference between the top civil servants in the two countries. These findings help us provide an answer to the first hypothesis formulated in the theoretical framework chapter.

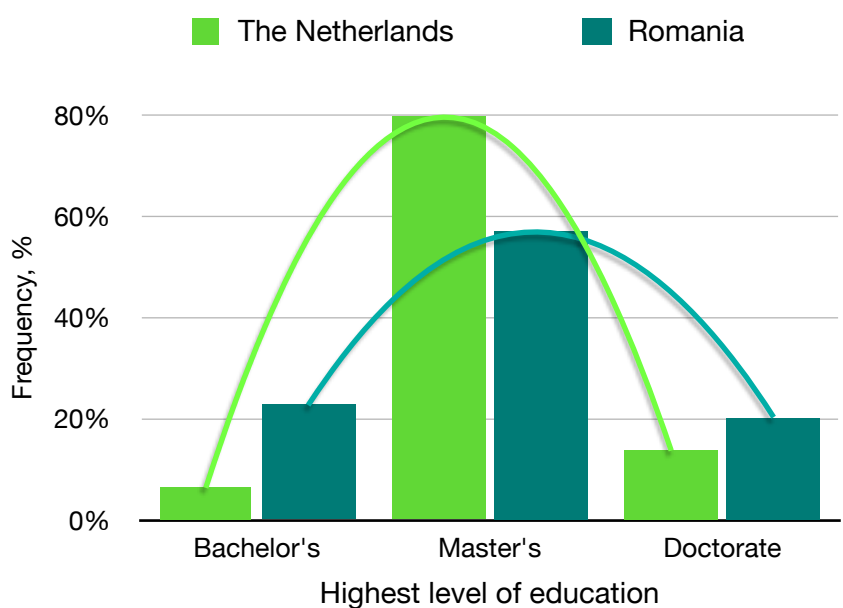
### 3) Level of education

The level of education of the top civil servants was operationalized as an ordinal variable, where 1 was attributed for a bachelor’s degree, 2 for a master’s degree and 3 for a doctorate degree. These values have a meaningful order because every level of education can be followed only after completing the previous one. The distribution of the observations together with the calculated relative frequencies can be seen in table 7.

**Table 7: Level of education frequency**

	The Netherlands, n, (%)	Romania, n, (%)
<i>Bachelor’s degree</i>	6 (6,28%)	19 (22,62%)
<i>Master’s degree</i>	70 (79,55%)	48 (57,14%)
<i>Doctorate degree</i>	12 (13,64%)	17 (20,24%)

**Figure 3: Bar chart: Distribution of top civil servants based on their highest degree**



The vast majority of top civil servants in both countries have a master's degree; almost 80% in the Netherlands and 57% in Romania. However, when looking at the trend curves we observe a clear difference. The curve representing the Dutch civil servants is taller which means that most civil servants in the Netherlands remain close to the mean. There are very few observations among the ends of the spectrum: bachelor's or doctorate degrees. The curve representing Romania is flatter which means there is a larger variety among Romanian top civil servants based on their highest educational level. Indeed, in Romania, there are more civil servants that stopped their education at a bachelor level compared to the Netherlands, but also more individuals that completed a Ph.D. education. The collected data in both countries will be compared using a Mann–Whitney U test. Under the null hypothesis, the assumption is that the distribution of two populations is equal, based on their level of education. This statistical test is useful when comparing two independent groups, in our case the Dutch and Romanian top civil servants, when the dependent variable, in our case the educational level, is ordinal, continuous and the two samples are independent (McKnight & Najab, 2010).

**Table 8: Descriptive statistics. Level of education**

	The Netherlands	Romania
<i>Mean</i>	2,07	1,97
<i>Standard Error</i>	0,05	0,07
<i>Mode</i>	2	2
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	0,45	0,65
<i>Sample Variance</i>	0,20	0,43
<i>Count</i>	88	84

The most accurate indicator of the level of education would be the mode of the distribution, which is the value that appears the most often among our two populations. In both countries that would be (2), which is a master's degree.

After running the Mann–Whitney U test, the following results have been obtained:

**U = 3973**, which is in the 95% region of acceptance: [3172, 56 ; 4219, 43];

**Test statistic Z = 1,0353**, which is in the 95% region of acceptance: [-1,96 ; 1,96];

**p value = 0,3005** > 0,05, which means that the difference between the value of Group 1 (the Netherlands) and the Group 2 (Romania) populations is not big enough to be statistically significant. In other words, the collected data fails to reject the null hypothesis, there is not

enough evidence to claim that the two groups are statistically different. The two groups are educated at a relatively equal level.

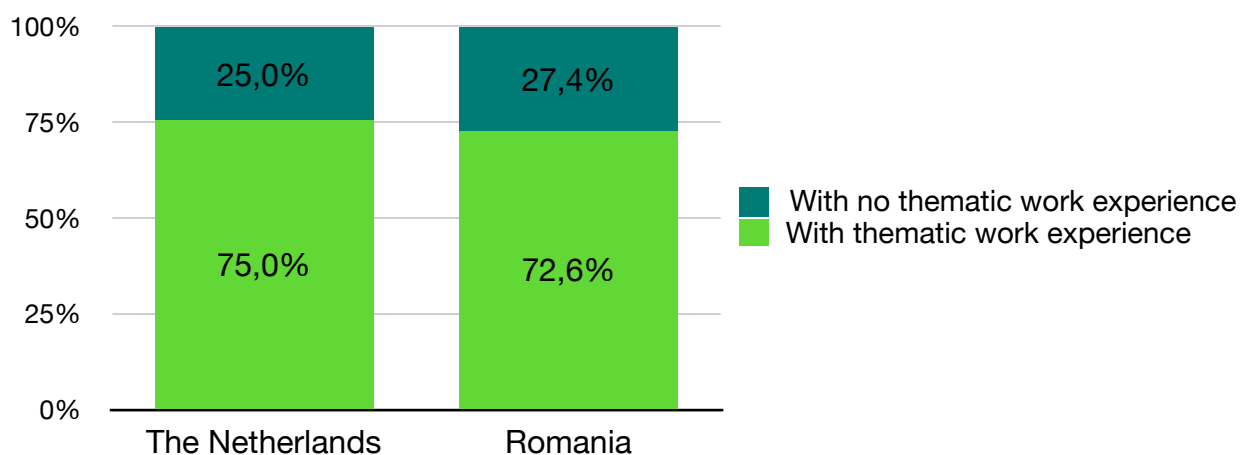
#### 4) Relevance of previous work experience

After analyzing the educational background of the sample populations, we move to their previous work experience. First, we wanted to know how many top civil servants have prior thematic experience relevant for the ministry where they are employed at. Even though each ministry requires a particular area of expertise, top civil servants may have a more generalist working background. The collected data is presented in table 9.

**Table 9: Frequency of thematic work experience**

	The Netherlands	Romania	Both
Civil servants that have thematic work experience	66 (75%)	61 (72,6%)	123
Civil servants that do not have thematic work experience	22 (25%)	23 (27,4%)	55
Total	88 (100%)	84 (100%)	178

**Figure 4: Stacked column graph: Proportion of top civil servants with prior relevant work experience**



The numbers regarding the thematic work experience of both the Dutch and Romanian civil servants look very similar. After collecting data about the top civil servants, we find that 75% of the Dutch top civil servants have professional expertise acquired from previous work experience which is relevant to the current department they work in. The

number is slightly lower in Romania, where 72,6% have included in their CVs relevant thematic work experience. A z test of independence is a useful statistical significance test to compare the association between two classifications. In this case, the two categorical variables are the country of origin of the top civil servants and whether they had previous relevant work experience for the department they are employed at or not. We want to test if there is a statistically significant association between these two categorical variables. Does the country of origin have an impact on the amount of top civil servants that have previous professional experience relevant to the ministerial department they work at? After running the statistical test on our contingency table  $TABLE = [66, 61, 22, 23]$ , the following z statistics value has been calculated:  $z = 0,3551 < 1,96$ . The observed  $p$  value = 0.7225, and since  $p \geq ,05$ , we conclude that the null hypothesis is not rejected. We do not find a strong statistical association between the national bureaucracy and the percentage of top civil servants that have thematic professional work experience. The proportions are very similar in both countries.

#### 5) Private sector experience

Managerial skills are usually described as competencies that are related to the private sector. Therefore, previous work experience in the private sector can be a useful indicator of the number of bureaucrats that possess this type of skill. After analyzing the CVs of the two sample populations, the following data has been collected:

**Table 10: Frequency of top civil servants based on their private sector experience**

	The Netherlands, frequency	Romania, frequency
Civil servants with previous private sector work experience	35 (39,8%)	40 (47,6%)
Civil servants with no previous private sector work experience	53 (60,2%)	44 (52,4%)
Total	88 (100%)	84 (100%)

We observe small differences in the collected data from the two bureaucracies. Around 40% of the Dutch top civil servants previously worked in the private sector. In Romania, this indicator is slightly higher, where about 48% of top civil servants held a job in the private sector in the past. We want to know if these two populations differ significantly on this specific characteristic. Both populations follow a binomial distribution (0 for no previous work experience in the private sector, and 1 for at least 2 years of work experience in the private sector) and are independent of each other. Therefore, the most appropriate

test is the two proportion z test. The following null hypothesis will be tested:  $H_0 : p_1 < p_2$ , therefore we want to know if there is enough evidence to conclude that the proportion of Dutch civil servants who have private sector work experience is higher than the proportion of Romanian civil servants who have the same type of experience. A right-tailed test and a z test for two populations proportions will be used. The obtained results are the following: The z statistic  $z = -1,0373$ , and  $p = 0,8502$  which is higher than ,05. In this case, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, hence there is not enough evidence to say that the proportion of Dutch civil servants that have private sector professional experience is higher than the proportion of Romanian civil servants who have private sector professional experience.

## 6) Interdepartmental mobility

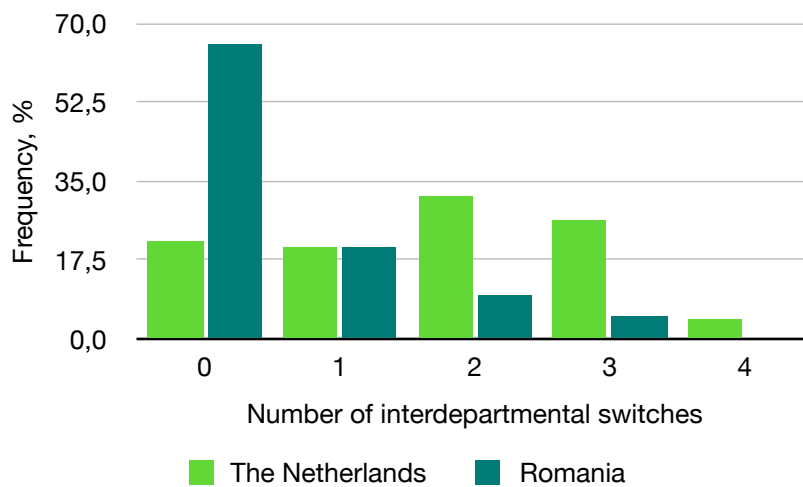
Interdepartmental mobility was operationalized as a discrete variable, which can take any value starting from 0, 1, 2, 3, etc., based on the number of times that the civil servant changed the ministerial department where they work at. If the civil servant never changed their department, a 0 was attributed, and one unit was added to the count every time they switched the department. The collected data together with some descriptive statistics of the variable are presented in table 11.

**Table 11: Departmental changes among top civil servants**

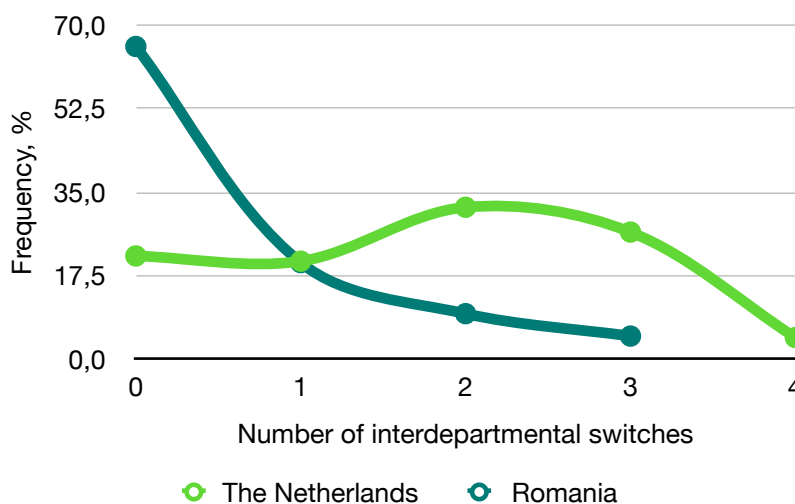
	Country	
Number of departmental changes	The Netherlands	Romania
0	19 (21,6%)	55 (65,5%)
1	18 (20,5%)	17 (20,2%)
2	28 (31,8%)	8 (9,5%)
3	19 (26,6%)	4 (4,8%)
4	4 (4,5%)	0
5	0	0
Total	88 (100%)	84 (100%)
Descriptive statistics		
Mean	1,67	0,54
Mode	2	0
Standard deviation	1,17	0,86



**Figure 5: Distribution of top civil servants based on interdepartmental mobility**



**Figure 6: Distribution curve. Number of interdepartmental changes / country**



As suggested in the table and graphs above, there is a visible difference between the two countries. Most top civil servants in Romania only worked for one ministry, the interdepartmental mobility is relatively low. The situation is different in the Netherlands, where almost 80% of the civil servants switched their ministerial department at least one time. As expected, after running a chi square test of independence, we find that there is a significant statistical association between the country and the degree of interdepartmental mobility observed among their top bureaucrats,  $\chi^2(4, N = 172) = 42,36, p = 1,40e-8 < ,001$ .

## 7) Political craft

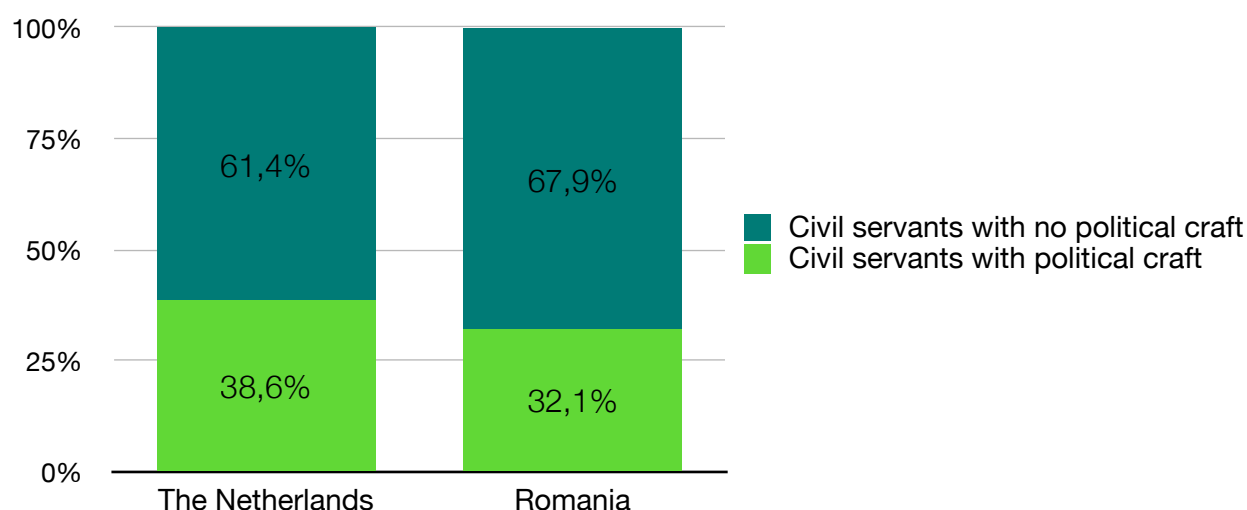
Political craft became an important requirement for seniors bureaucrats. This type of skill is observed among top civil servants that have prior work experience close to the prime

minister, ministers of relevant departments, or other high-ranked officials. After a close analysis of the top civil servant’s resumes, the following data has been collected:

**Table 12: Frequency of political craft among top civil servants**

	The Netherlands, frequency	Romania, frequency
Civil servants who have experience that would indicate a degree of political craft	34 (38,6%)	40 (32,1%)
Civil servants with no political craft	54 (61,4%)	44 (67,9%)
Total	88 (100%)	84 (100%)

**Figure 7: Distribution of top civil servants based on political craft**



After analyzing the data from the table above and looking at the graph, we observe that the frequency of top civil servants that show proof of political craft slightly differs in both countries, with 38,6% in the Netherlands and 32,1% in Romania. How strong is the statistical evidence that in the Netherlands more senior bureaucrats can be considered to have political craft as one of their competencies than in Romania? A two sample z test for proportions is necessary to answer this question. After running the test, the following results are reported:  $z = 0,89$ , and  $p = 0,1868 > ,05$ . The null hypothesis that in the Netherlands the proportion of top civil servants that have political craft is less or equal than in Romania cannot be rejected. Therefore, there is no evidence that political craft is statistically significantly more common in the Dutch bureaucracy than in the Romanian one.

## 8) Political loyalty

Besides meritocratic competencies, political loyalty is another aspect that might help a civil servant advance in their career. The level of politicization in a public administrative system is strongly related to the amount of top civil servants that have connections to a political party. In the Netherlands, the following political parties ruled the government in the first trimester of 2021: VVD, CDA, CU and D66. In Romania, the ruling political parties in 2021 were PNL, USR and UDMR. Information was collected and it was found that certain individuals had ties to the ruling political parties. The number of top civil servants who are linked in a way to a political party is presented in table 13.

**Table 13: Frequency of political loyalty among top civil servants**

	The Netherlands, frequency	Romania, frequency
Civil servants not connected to a political party	79 (89,8%)	54 (64,3%)
Civil servants connected to a political party	9 (10,2%)	30 (35,7%)
Total	88 (100%)	84 (100%)

We observe that more top civil servants are associated with a political party in Romania than in the Netherlands. To test whether the difference is statistically significant, we need to test the following null hypothesis: In the Netherlands, the proportion of top civil servants associated to a political party is different compared to the proportion of the Romanian top civil servants affiliated with a political party. A two sample z test reports the following results:  $z = -3,9906$ , and  $p = 0,0001 < ,05$ . We conclude that the null hypothesis is rejected. The proportion of Dutch civil servants affiliated with a political party is lower than in Romania, and the difference is statistically significant.

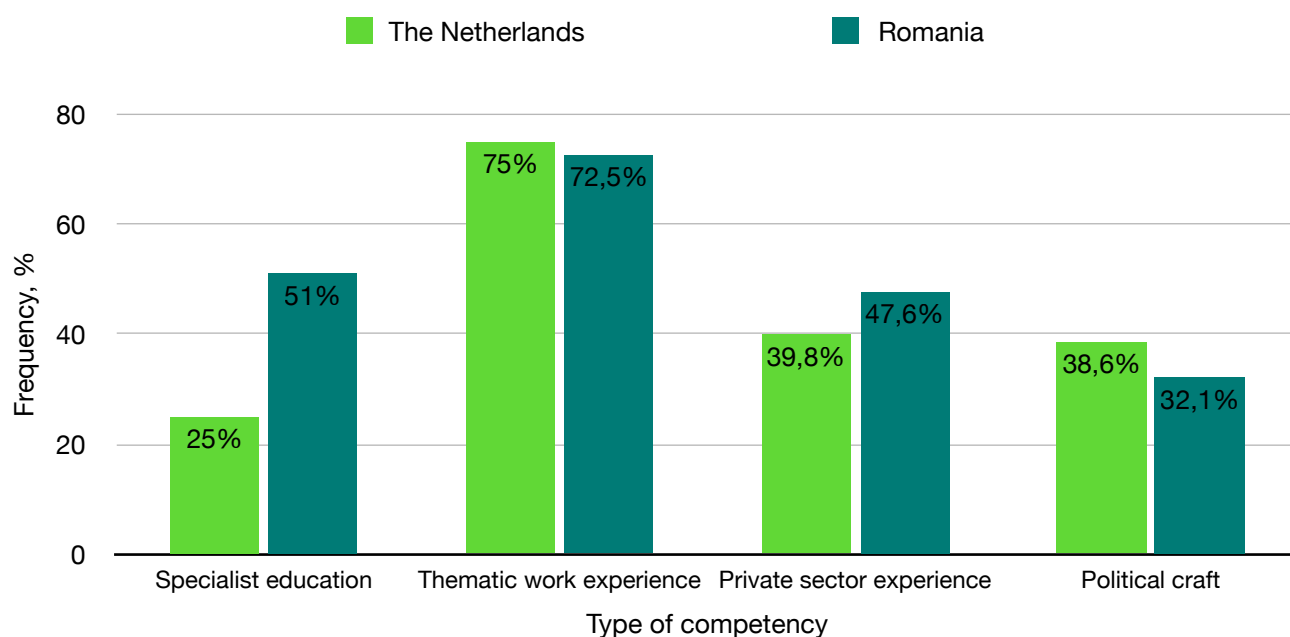
**Table 14: Summing up. Competencies and used statistical tests**

	Used test	Difference
1) Field of education	Chi-square test	Not significant
2) Generalists vs. Specialists	Two sample z test of proportion	Statistically significant
3) Level of education	Mann–Whitney U test	Not significant
4) Relevance of previous work experience	Two sample z test of proportion	Not significant

5) Private sector experience	Two sample z test of proportion	Not significant
6) Interdepartmental mobility	Chi-square test	Statistically significant
7) Political craft	Two sample z test of proportion	Not significant
8) Political affiliation	Two sample z test of proportion	Statistically significant

To sum up, for some types of skills, significant differences have been observed between the Dutch and Romanian public administrations. For other aspects, however, few variations have been noticed. Very few top civil servants were found to have all three types of skills: technical expertise, managerial skills and political craft. Generally, not many top civil servants studied a discipline that is strongly connected to the department where they work at. Specialist education was observed at 25% of the Dutch top civil servants and 51% of the Romanian top civil servants. However, most of the senior bureaucrats in both countries have thematic work experience which undoubtedly increases their expertise knowledge in their area of activity (75% in the Netherlands and 72,5% in Romania). The majority of civil servants in both countries also worked primarily in the public sector their whole life. The percentage of individuals that have private sector experience was proven to be relatively low (39,8% in the Netherlands and 47,6% in Romania). The situation is similar for political craft since most top civil servants do not present any prior work experience close to a high-ranking official. Political craft was observed at 38,6% of the Dutch top civil servants and 32,1% of the Romanian top civil servants. The frequencies of each studied competency for top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania are systemized in figure 11.

**Figure 8: Top civil servants' competencies**



## 4.2 Discussion

In the second part of the chapter, the collected data and the empirical analysis will be used to give an answer to the hypotheses formulated in the theoretical framework section. Each hypothesis will be either accepted or rejected based on the findings of this research.

### H1: Proportion of generalists vs. specialists

Based on existing literature, the first expectation stated that in the Netherlands, the proportion of generalists within the top civil service will be higher than within the Romanian civil service. Oppositely, we expected that in Romania more specialists work within their public administration. I found enough evidence to support this claim. Indeed, the collected data confirms that top bureaucrats in the Netherlands tend to have on average a more generalist background than their Romanian counterparts. After analyzing the binomial distribution of generalists and specialists in both countries, we found evidence that there is a statistically significant difference between the two countries ( $p < .001$ ). The proportion of generalists in the Netherlands is significantly higher than in Romania. Three quarters of the Dutch bureaucrats are generalists, whereas only about half of the Romanian population can be considered as such. It means that it is more common in the Netherlands that top civil servants have skills that are transferable among various departments. These findings are based on the discipline that top civil servants graduated in.

The conclusion can be additionally confirmed by analyzing the collected data regarding interdepartmental mobility of top civil servants in both countries. Most Dutch top civil servants changed the ministry they are working for at least 2 times. On average, interdepartmental switches happen 3 times more often in the Netherlands than in Romania. Most top civil servants never switched their ministerial department in Romania. We observed a statistically significant association between the country and the level of interdepartmental mobility ( $p < .001$ ), therefore enough evidence was collected to support the claim. We conclude, based on the findings, that the expertise knowledge of the Dutch civil servants is more adaptable across different ministries. The findings, yet not particularly surprising, allow us to have a general overview of the variations across the two countries. If we were to analyze the Dutch case, arguably the most important administrative change in the past decades was the creation of the Senior Public Service (Algemene Bestuursdienst, ABD) in 1995. A central reason for the creation of the ABD was the desire to reduce compartmentalization, which was seen as a weakness of the Dutch administrative system (Raadschelders & van der Meer, 2014). In the Netherlands, low inter-ministerial mobility was viewed as an impediment to a well-organized decision making process. Therefore, Dutch

senior civil servants are required legally to change frequently the ministry they work for (Steen et al., 2015). As a result, the creation of the ABD was supposed to increase interdepartmental mobility and to switch more specialists into generalist positions. “The major priority and emphasis of the ABD so far has been on horizontal mobility and recruitment patterns” (Raadschelders & van der Meer, 1998, p. 211). Requirements for staff mobility can be linked to the desire of hiring more generalists than specialists (Ban, 2010). This shows us that the Dutch system was built to become more generalist, where bureaucrats can move easily across different departments. The situation is different in Romania, where interdepartmental mobility was never a priority for the government. Central and Eastern European countries distinguish themselves with their communist past. Before 1990, the general tradition was that all civil servants were expected to be specialists, therefore bureaucrats had limited professional mobility. Generalists were not present in the public administration systems and all the coordination within departments was done at the level of the national communist parties. These tendencies were inherited by most Eastern European countries, where the majority of civil servants are only experts in a narrow area (Bodea & Creta, 2005).

After analyzing the thematic work experience of the top civil servants in both the Netherlands and Romania, we find that there is no significant difference that can be observed between the two countries. Both samples of civil servants share similar proportions of individuals that hold prior professional experience thematically related to the ministry they hold an office at. From this perspective, we can agree that in both countries civil servants share a similar amount of thematic work experience, which is a good indicator of specialist knowledge in a particular area. However, the data collected about the degrees of the top civil servants is not negligible. More Romanian civil servants have a degree that makes them be considered specialists for the department they work at. There is also enough evidence to confirm that Dutch bureaucrats are on average more often generalists. As a result, the first hypothesis is accepted.

## **H2: Managerial skills**

The second hypothesis was formulated around the managerial skills of the top civil servants in the studied countries. Due to an increased intensity of the NPM ideas in the Netherlands, we expected that the Dutch civil servants have more managerial skills than the Romanian civil servants. This could be tested by analyzing the number of individuals that have previous work experience in the private sector. The results of a two sample z test of proportions reported that there is not enough evidence to accept this claim ( $p = 0,8502$ ). On the contrary, more Romanian senior bureaucrats (48% of them) previously worked in the private sector, whereas only about 40% of the Dutch ones share a similar experience. Our findings also confirmed that Dutch civil servants change their departments 3 times more

often than their Romanian counterparts. This fact contributes positively to their range of managerial skills. However, due to the strong lack of evidence that the Dutch senior bureaucrats have more experience in the private sector than the Romanian ones, the second hypothesis is rejected.

### **H3: Party affiliation**

The third hypothesis stated that Romanian top civil servants identify themselves more commonly to one of the leading political parties than the Dutch top civil servants. The collected data shows that around one-third of the Romanian bureaucrats had ties to one of the ruling political parties. This number is lower in the Netherlands, where only 10% of the sample population was found to be associated with a political party that forms the government. We wanted to know how strong the evidence is that this trend is more common in the Romanian civil service than in the Dutch one. The findings provide enough grounds to confirm this claim ( $p < ,05$ ). Indeed, a two sample z test of proportions reported that there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The proportion of the Romanian sample population that identifies to a political party is statistically significantly higher than the Dutch sample population, therefore the formulated hypothesis is accepted. Generally, Eastern European countries are still building an administrative system that is based on meritocratic criteria and promotes individuals in a fair way. In Romania, the administrative system was built differently than in the Western side of the European continent since it inherited characteristics from different political regimes. The system was under the influence of the communist regime, which strongly affected the values of the public administration system in Romania. This period is characterized as one that suppressed meritocracy since the system was heavily influenced by politicians (Matei, 2013). Due to an increased level of politicization, it is not surprising that the amount of civil servants associated with a ruling political party is higher in Romania. Generally, Dutch civil servants are believed to be appointed based on their competence and experience, although some studies also suggest that political appointments are not uncommon (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016). The findings on this paper reported few Dutch individuals that had ties to one of the ruling political parties.

### **H4: Political craft**

The last formulated hypothesis was based on the idea that political craft becomes more of a prerequisite for top civil servants that work in countries ruled by multi-party governments. The political landscape in the Netherlands involves more parties than in Romania, hence we expected that political craft is a skill that is more common in the Dutch bureaucracy than in the Romanian one. Not enough evidence was found to support this

claim. The difference between the Romanian and Dutch civil servants on this matter was found to be not statistically significant ( $p = 0,1868 > ,05$ ). The fourth hypothesis is rejected since the collected data suggests that the proportion of Dutch civil servants that can list political craft as one of their skills is not higher than the proportion of Romanian civil servants that possess this type of skill. One explanation for these findings would be that in both countries, the political scene is diverse and involves multiple parties. Both in Romania and the Netherlands, a government has to be formed by a coalition of multiple political parties. For that reason, the proportion of civil servants that have political craft could follow to some extent similar trends in both countries.

**Table 15: Overall hypotheses results**

Hypothesis		Result
H1.1	Top civil servants in the Netherlands are more likely to have a generalist background than top civil servants in Romania.	Accepted
H1.2	Top civil servants in Romania are more likely to be specialists in a narrow domain than top civil servants in the Netherlands.	
H2	Dutch top civil servants have more managerial skills than the Romanian top civil servants.	Rejected
H3	Top civil servants in the Netherlands are less likely to be affiliated with a political party than top civil servants in Romania.	Accepted
H4	Dutch civil servants have more political craft than the Romanian top civil servants.	Rejected



## 5 Conclusion

In the last section of the thesis, the results of the empirical analysis reported in the fourth chapter will be discussed and linked to the theoretical framework presented in the second chapter of this paper. A comprehensive answer will be given to the major research question of this thesis and some final summarizing remarks will be added. New academic contributions provided with this thesis will be presented. Lastly, some limitations of the thesis will be explained and some recommendations for future research will be suggested.

The main goal of the research was to gain more insight into the set of skills and competencies characteristic for top civil servants. Moreover, the thesis decided to follow a comparative approach by measuring the variations observed within two different European bureaucracies. Two case studies have been selected for this paper: the Netherlands and Romania. Despite common trends, such as globalization and Europeanization, differences in the competency aspect of the PSBs have been expected. Both countries inherited different administrative traditions and values because of their different historical legacy. The intensity and direction of administrative reforms were distinct in both democracies. As a result, Romanian and Dutch civil servants do not share an identical set of skills. Biographical information was collected about senior bureaucrats working in these two countries in April 2021, to answer the general research question: “What are the competencies of top civil servants in the Netherlands and Romania and how can we explain the observed differences between the two countries?”

After analyzing the scientific literature regarding the competency of top civil servants, three main types of skills have been described in the theoretical framework section: expertise knowledge, managerial skills and political competencies. Several comparative hypotheses have been formulated around these competencies and their possible variations between the two countries. One expectation was that the proportion of generalists is higher in the Netherlands since the Romanian national bureaucracy shows a preference for specialists. After analyzing data of 88 Dutch top civil servants and 84 Romanian civil servants, enough evidence was found to confirm this claim and accept the related hypothesis. Based on that, the reported results provide additional support to the idea that CEE countries tend to prefer specialists over generalists. The assumption that specialists are preferred over generalists in Eastern European countries is not new since existing scientific literature focusing on CEE bureaucracies has been already discussing the idea. The main explanation provided for this can be traced back in time, when Eastern European public bureaucracies were strongly influenced by the norms of the communist regime. Generally, the system before 1990 allowed little room for initiative from top civil servants. The leadership and managerial aspects were done at the level of the ruling party, and top civil servants were expected to be solely executors of the orders given by the

politicians. This environment led to the creation of a general norm where top civil servants were expected to possess expertise knowledge in a specific narrow area and simply follow the indications of their leaders. Decades after the fall of the communist regimes, the consequences of that period are still persisting within the values of the Romanian public administration. The findings of this paper provide additional support and stand in accordance with this argument. Equally, it was confirmed that interdepartmental mobility happens at a much higher rate in the Netherlands. The findings, yet not surprising, confirm the fact that horizontal mobility remains an important priority within the Dutch civil service and is neglected within the Romanian one. In the Netherlands, the desire to promote inter-ministerial mobility was born long ago, as an attempt to reduce compartmentalization, and continues to be a unique aspect of their national bureaucracy (Raadschelders & van der Meer, 2014). This distinct feature of the ABD promoted top civil servants with a generalist background. Additionally, the reported results also confirm that top civil servants in the Netherlands are less likely to be associated with one of the ruling political parties than in Romania. This finding provides support for the claim that the aftermath of the communist period is still present within the Romanian national bureaucracy. Before 1990, it is generally believed that meritocracy within civil service was suppressed by the communist regime and partisan loyalty was an important prerequisite for any bureaucrat (Matei, 2013). With the collected data, evidence was found that politicization is observed at a higher rate in Romania than in the Netherlands, and more support is provided to the argument that the legacy of the communist period still affects the Romanian civil service, which is currently transitioning to a more meritocratic model.

Nevertheless, regarding certain competencies, the statistical analysis did not confirm our hypotheses. Indeed, the expectation that top civil servants in the Netherlands have more professional experience within the private sector than in Romania turned out to be wrong. After analyzing the sample populations, this type of experience was more often observed at the Romanian bureaucrats. The expectation was mainly derived from the idea that NPM ideas regarding public administration were more predominant in the Netherlands than in Romania (Dan, 2015). Generally, scientific literature suggests that this managerial approach was not that intense in CEE countries (Ágh, 2013). One potential explanation for these findings could be that prior experience in the private sector is not necessarily linked to the intensity of the NPM ideas within the national bureaucracies, or at least this should not be the only explanatory argument. Additional factors could as well contribute to the general tendency. Potentially, at the beginning of their careers, top civil servants in Romania prefer to start working in the private sector where more benefits are being offered to them.

On all the other aspects, differences measured between the Dutch and Romanian senior bureaucrats are negligible. On average, top civil servants follow similar educational trends in both countries. The frequency of their field of education and their highest level of

education achieved follow similar tendencies. Next, in both countries, the proportion of high-ranked bureaucrats that have thematic work experience relevant to their department is also very similar. Lastly, it was expected that political craft is more of a prerequisite for the Dutch top civil servants than their Romanian counterparts. The findings of this paper do not provide enough evidence to support this claim. One explanation is that in both countries, the political environment is diverse and the ruling coalition is for the most part formed by multiple elected parties. As a result, the proportion of this kind of competency follows similar trends in both democracies.

## **5.1 Contributions to academia**

This thesis was motivated by an existing academic gap regarding the competencies of senior civil servants. By collecting data, comparing it and reporting the findings, new contributions have been made in academia about the topic. The thesis helps fill certain gaps in research and provides specifically more information about the Dutch and Romanian public administrations and their respective PSB. By providing an answer to the research question, data has been collected about the educational background and professional experience of the top civil servants in the studied countries. This information was used to quantify certain competencies, which are believed to be necessary for a top-level bureaucrat, such as managerial skills, political competencies, etc. The findings confirm that the competency aspect of the PSB differs among countries, and that European bureaucracies followed different paths of development. Nevertheless, similarities were observed among several aspects, which makes us consider that national public administrations are becoming progressively converged in Europe, possibly due to the process of globalization and Europeanization. This type of research is new for most Eastern European countries, including Romania since most scientific literature relating to public administration focuses on the Western part of the European continent. Extra support was found for the argument that the legacies of the communist past still persist within the Romanian civil service. For the Dutch case, the research supplements the contributions already done by other papers with up-to-date information about individuals holding an office in spring 2021. It was confirmed that the Dutch bureaucracy is built on meritocracy and it gives strong incentives that promote top civil servants with a generalist educational background.

The paper has provided a comparison between two EU national bureaucracies, by shedding light on the similarities and differences discovered between them. Due to the complex nature of cross-national comparative studies, little research has been done in comparing top civil servants among countries. The findings of this thesis contribute to the public administrative literature about the variations among top civil servants. For most aspects, little variation has been observed between the two bureaucracies. However, a

clear difference between the proportion of generalists and specialists has been found between Romania and the Netherlands, as well as different levels of political affiliation observed among top civil servants. This type of knowledge is necessary to converge the European bureaucracies so that a more efficient collaboration between them can be established. Comparative research is equally important for Eastern European states that try to catch up with the Western norms and values. Additional research could be inspired from this paper so that more comparative studies are done among European nations and their top civil servants.

Lastly, in order to complete the research, a data set with biographical information about top civil servants has been created, using information gathered from various trustworthy online sources. The data set could be used for further studies that include the Dutch and Romanian civil service. The collected information could be used for additional research about the competency of top civil servants which could potentially include even more study cases.

## **5.2 Limitations of the research**

It is important to discuss the limitations of this research, so we can understand which improvements and contributions can be added to this paper. Firstly, the sample population only included individuals working as bureaucrats during a specific period (spring 2021). However, the individuals holding these positions switch regularly. This can happen for multiple reasons, such as change of the government or term expiration. To get a more comprehensive overview of the top civil servants' skills, it would be indeed interesting to study changes that occur over time within the national European bureaucracies. Yet, collecting data about top civil servants that worked in the past was proven to be a hard task. Most ministerial websites only publish biographical information about the current individuals working for them, therefore, for this paper, focusing on the present-day situation was the most practical option.

Secondly, the research methodology also included certain limitations. The observed variations among civil servants working in different countries are usually explained by the national administrative traditions. These aspects are hard to quantify since they belong to a more qualitative side of research. This paper had a quantitative approach, where the national country has been considered the only independent variable. By analyzing additional scientific sources, national laws, administrative developments, etc., it is possible to provide a more comprehensive explanatory part that would give insight into the reasons for the variations among countries.

The paper focused mainly on merit-based competencies and slightly on the political affiliation of top civil servants. Still, the entire spectrum of skills specific for these individuals does not end here. Competencies such as creativity, innovation capabilities, social skills, etc., are hard to be objectively quantified just by studying the educational background and previous work experience of an individual. Therefore, certain aspects have not been researched in this paper, due to the difficult nature of data collection about top civil servants. Nevertheless, the competencies that are most often mentioned in the scientific literature have been examined in this research. In the end, a strong overview of the top civil servants' competency has been presented in the empirical results. Additional methods of data collection, such as questionnaires or interviews could be useful to complement the findings of this paper.

Lastly, the findings of this thesis cannot be generalized to other countries. Each national bureaucracy has a distinct Public Service Bargain, which implies that the demanded competency from a civil servant differs considerably across nations. The paper focused on two study cases and provided knowledge that generally applies only to these two countries. Nevertheless, the paper helps grasp a first idea over the competency of top civil servants in Eastern Europe and how they compare to the Western bureaucrats. Additional research is necessary to apprehend more variations present among European bureaucracies.

### **5.3 Recommendations for future research**

Research about the skills of the top civil servants remains limited, especially in Eastern European countries. Future research could be extended to other countries since focusing on additional study cases would help obtain a more extensive outline of the matter. If enough data is collected about additional Western and Eastern European bureaucracies, a more comprehensive comparative overview could be drawn. New research could find more similarities and differences among top civil servants in different countries, and decide which bureaucracies are the most similar to each other and which ones present significant differences. Eventually, countries could be grouped based on the common trends observed among the top civil servants' competency.

For the Dutch and Romanian case, future research could also include different time periods. If the population size is increased and includes individuals that worked in the past, the collected empirical data would become more reliable and the results would be more accurate. Equally, for both bureaucracies, the variations over time can be studied to understand in which direction the PSBs are evolving. Besides that, additional control variables, such as the policy field of the top civil servants or their position level, could be added to study the competencies of bureaucrats in the Netherlands and Romania.

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